



## Sharing Together Enriches Potential Success for Children

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Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am the Coordinator of Coventry STEPS, which is Coventry's Early Childhood Collaborative. Coventry STEPS is a 50+ member organization comprised of local and state leaders, early care and education professionals and parents and community members that seeks to ensure that all Coventry children are Nurtured, Healthy and Engaged & Successful Learners. Coventry STEPS has been in existence since 2008. Coventry has been receiving support from the Graustein Memorial Fund, in partnership with the Office of Early Childhood. As you may know, the Graustein Memorial Fund is now focusing their efforts in a different field, which leaves the funding for our early childhood collaborative, and many others around the state very uncertain. It is imperative that the funding for **Community Plans for Early Childhood** from the Office of Early Childhood be continued! Local Early Childhood Councils (LECC's) that have been working on the Community Plans are a coordinated, effective network, which are positioned to bring together key stakeholders in a community for a common purpose, without duplicating efforts. LECC's can also provide the critical local early childhood voice as CT works to coordinate the new ESSA plan.

Coventry STEPS has been very successful in engagement of the community around all early childhood initiatives. Coventry STEPS has created a forum for all stake holders, which did not exist in years past, to work together to improve outcomes for young children. Coventry STEPS has been able to partner with parents and provide them with information and resources. Coventry STEPS has created a birth packet, which is sent to all families who have a new baby, a website, a facebook page and an eight page early childhood resource guide. Parents now have access to meaningful, local information. None of these materials and resources were available before our LECC was in existence.

Without funding from the Office of Early Childhood for the Community Plans for Early Childhood, we will have very limited, or perhaps no resources for local data collection, community publications, events for children and their families, parent engagement opportunities, and most importantly the staff that provides leadership to ensure that all

In the OEC Strategic Plan, dated January 2016, there are several objectives that are, in my opinion, going to be near impossible for OEC to accomplish without the support of local collaboratives. First, Objective 1.1 strategy 2 lists: Communicate effectively with families and caregivers. My fifteen years of experience working with children and their families has proven that relationships are the best way to really make a positive impact in a child's life. Communicating and supporting families is best done at a local level by experts in that community who have relationships with the families and with all the providers and services in the area. A family friendly OEC website would be helpful, but to really make a difference, the State needs to have that support at the local level. Second, Objective 4.1 strategy 2 lists: Support and connect with local planning and collaboration partners (existing early childhood local planning bodies). Without funding support for OEC, communities such as Coventry and others around the state may no longer have Early Childhood Collaboratives, thus making this strategy difficult, if not near impossible, for OEC to achieve.

We know that birth-age 5 is the most critical time for brain development. For that reason, **I oppose all cuts to the Office of Early Childhood.** We MUST invest all resources necessary to ensure that children grow and develop and become productive and contributing members to society in the future.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathryn Hassler  
Director, Coventry STEPS